News release

Met Office brings breath of fresh air to Cambridge

7 June 2002

Cambridgeshire's residents, workers and visitors are set to benefit from the Met Office's innovative air-quality service, thanks to a new contract with Cambridgeshire County Council, which will be launched on 12 June 2002 at the Cambridgeshire County Chamber.

The County Council will be using the Met Office's local air-quality forecast service to help them reduce air pollution and improve health by providing daily air-quality predictions for the general public's use. The launch will include presentations on air quality management, forecasting systems and the links between air quality and health. The general public are invited to attend part of the launch, where they can see exhibitions on for example, climate change, travel and transport and biodiversity and air quality. A free vehicle emissions test is also available.

The daily air-quality forecast, which will be relayed to the general public via the internet and radio, predicts pollution levels by using local weather forecast information and pollution data. The service uses the recently developed air pollution branding system, which measures pollution levels against a range of points from one to ten. If the pollution levels are moderate (above three) or high (above seven), sensitive individuals, such as some asthma sufferers, may feel discomfort. Forecasts will also indicate UV levels, enabling action to avoid sunburn.

The service will also be used to encourage motorists to do their bit to reduce pollution. Shona Johnstone, the County Council's Environment and Transport Cabinet Member, said "We know that most of our air-quality problems are linked to traffic growth. By raising awareness of pollution and health issues, so people can use less-polluting means of travel when forecasts are high, this system will help us improve air quality in Cambridgeshire. It is the first of its kind in the Eastern Region and is the result of the County Council working together with the district councils to improve air quality in the county."

Ben Miners, Principal Consultant at the Met Office, said: "The Met Office is delighted to have won the contract to supply Cambridgeshire with the new air-quality forecast service. We supply this innovative service to other local authorities in parts of the UK, including East and West Sussex, Hampshire and the City of Leicester. The Met Office is eager to continue to play a part in improving air quality throughout the UK."

Notes

For further information about the launch event for the Met Office's air quality forecasting service contact Janet Martin, Environment Quality Officer for Cambridgeshire County Council on 01223 717831.

Speeches at the launch to be held at the Cambridgeshire County Chamber, will include Dr Tim Chatterton, Air Quality Resource Centre, University of West of England - 'An Overview of Air Quality Management in the UK'; Ben Miners, the Met Office, - 'Cambridgeshire's Air Quality Forecasting System; and Dr Kate King, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Public Health Network - Air Quality Links with Health.

The Met Office recognises that thriving organisations need to remain at the forefront of technology and innovation. Met Office scientists are continually developing and improving systems for the benefit of its customers. Examples of Met Office innovation include the development of a Braille weather chart, a severe-weather warning model, a weather and health service that predicts rises in weather-related illnesses, and research on weather-related consumer behaviour.

The Met Office simulates emissions from traffic and industry and calculates their relative contribution to pollution levels. The complex effects involved in pollution dispersion are also simulated, including terrain effects, chemical reactions, buoyant plume rise and time-varying emissions.

The environmental impact of chemicals released into the air is largely dependent on atmospheric conditions that control their transportation and chemical and physical form. The Met Office's forecast service predicts poor air quality - using a world-class dispersion model called NAME - by calculating where the four different pollutants - sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulates and ozone - will concentrate. The Met Office models UK, as well as European, atmospheric conditions and emissions to generate information for its local air-quality forecasts.

More information about the Cambridgeshire air-quality service

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